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Marillion: Downward Into Blue Sky

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By: [Dennis Cook](#) :: Images courtesy of www.marillion.com

Not many bands approaching 30 years together continue to grow. Most coast on the strength of past triumphs and good will, and like a marriage or a pension-minded career, it's easy to settle into ruts. It takes concentrated effort to continually evolve, especially in



Marillion

artistic endeavors. [Marillion](#) is the rare exception to the rule. From their formation in Aylesbury, England in 1979 through their recently released fourteenth studio album, *Somewhere Else* (released 4.24.07 on Mvd Visual), this precociously energetic quintet has always focused on today and tomorrow, revisiting the past only when they could mutate it in some fresh way.

"When you've made so many albums over so many years you have to keep changing," says guitarist **Steve Rothery**, an axe-man who combines the stratospheric beauty of [David Gilmour](#) with an incisive, diamond-tipped imagination all his own. "When you do try different things you run the risk of losing a percentage of your audience. There'll always be certain people that want you to carry on making the same record time and time again. But, as writers and artists you have to have the freedom to take it where you want. That's pretty much what we've done throughout the whole of our careers."



Originally tagged with the loathsome albatross of "prog rock band," Marillion – a name derived from J.R.R. Tolkien's *Silmarillion* but long morphed past its fantasy book roots – echoed [Yes](#), [Peter Gabriel](#)-era [Genesis](#) and the frothier bits of [King](#)

[Crimson](#) on early albums like their 1983 debut, *Script For A Jester's Tear*, and 1985's *Misplaced Childhood*. These days

their sound hews far closer to [Radiohead](#), [Phish](#) and upstarts like [Midlake](#). They've always operated left of mainstream tastes, making music dialed into their own spheres rather than tailored for any outside market.

If they sound like these younger bands it's because they stumbled into the same fertile creative fields rather than any conscious imitation. Marillion are masters of long form composition, able to carry complex musical and lyrical concepts through numerous changes, inking the lines deeper and deeper as pieces progress. In recent times, they've refined things into shorter, sharper forms, unveiling a still very vibrant rock band lurking below all the loftiness.

"We've always strived to write the perfect song. That's what it boils down to really," offers bassist **Pete Trewavas**. "You don't want to be the best musicians or have the most flamboyant music, you just want to write the best songs."

A White-Knuckle Journey

Over the course of Marillion's career they've been a lot of different bands but a number of longtimers (this writer included) believe the last couple records, 2004's *Marbles* and this spring's fantastic *Somewhere Else* are their best work yet.

"Well, there's a few people saying that, and it doesn't surprise me," Trewavas says. "We've grown, and one of the things we've done recently - better than at any time in our career really - is bring the songwriting craft to the fore. We felt comfortable and able to do that. We haven't had to wrap a song up with lots of complicated musical structures, which maybe we've done in the past. Sometimes that's a good thing but sometimes you're covering up a natural flaw in the basic foundations of the song."



Marillion is dramatic, even melodramatic at times - delving into wars of foreign lands, environmental collapse, the nature of God and human existence, death and all manner of lust. They've also produced some of the most direct, sincere love songs ever written. Where in the past they occasionally veered into overly earnest territory, since the arrival of lead singer **Steve Hogarth** in 1989 there's been plenty of black humor and gory details to take the piss out of things. They balance their predilection for pomp with something more down-to-earth now. While adept at overriding story arcs and interlocking musical themes, *Somewhere Else* ditches the highbrow angles to reveal a working rock band offering up good songs they clearly enjoy playing.

"The title is what it's all about. We've taken the whole thing somewhere else. We're working with [producer] **Mike Hunter** [[Mansun](#), [Embrace](#)], and there was a freshness and kind of

energy that was brought to the sessions. It's a very forward-thinking kind of album," says Trewavas. "Mike just wanted to bring out one of the things we do best, which is performance, playing live. With songs like 'See It Like A Baby' or 'The Other Half' there's a sense of that band energy captured in the studio, the spark of something happening in the room."

"A lot of people say they much prefer us live to our records [*laughs*]. I do think we cut it live, though," adds Rothery. "Everywhere around the world we go, there's an intensity we get back from the audience. Whether it's South America or Mexico, there's an understanding and passion for the music that translates across languages and cultures. It's a great thing."

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